What is claimed is:

CLAIMS

1. A method for managing an auction, comprising:

specifying an auction behavior; and

specifying at least one rule for controlling when a bid may be placed automatically for a bidder in the auction according to the specified auction behavior.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

automatically placing at least one bid for a bidder according to the at least one rule and according to at least one specified bidding behavior.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein the specified bidding behavior comprises a maximum bid and a minimum bid increment.

4. The method of claim 2, wherein automatically placing at least one bid for the bidder comprises:

if a highest bid in the auction is not from the bidder, placing the bid according to the at least one specified bidding behavior at a time according to the at least one rule.

5. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving at least one bid placed automatically according to the at least one rule and according to at least one specified bidding behavior.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein specifying an auction behavior comprises determining the auction behavior according to information about the auction.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein the information about the auction comprises at least one of information about an item, information about a seller and information about bidders.

8. The Method of claim 7, wherein determining the auction behavior comprises;

receiving information about one or more prior auctions, wherein each of the prior auctions has an associated auction behavior;

identifying at least one of the prior auctions as similar to the auction based on the information about the auction and the information about the one or more prior auctions; and

selecting one or more of the prior auctions identified as similar to the auction.

9. The method of claim 8, further comprising selecting the auction behavior associated with the selected one or more prior auctions as the auction behavior.

10. The method of claim 8, wherein identifying at least one of the prior auctions similar to the auction comprises:

comparing information about the auction to the information about the one or more prior auctions using a metric to obtain a measure; and

comparing the measure to a threshold defining an extent of similarity.

11. The method of claim 8, wherein the selected one or more prior auctions has a best outcome among the at least one of the prior auctions identified as similar to the auction.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein a best outcome is at least one of a highest price and a fastest sale.

13. The method of claim 1, wherein specifying at least one rule comprises:

associating at least one rule with at least one candidate auction behavior from which the auction behavior is specified; and

selecting the at least one rule associated with the specified auction behavior.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein associating at least one rule with each candidate auction behavior comprises:

determining at least one rule that corresponds to each candidate auction behavior; and

storing the at least one rule in a database.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein determining at least one rule which corresponds to each candidate auction behavior comprises:

characterizing each candidate auction behavior; and

selecting rules corresponding to the candidate auction behavior.

16. The method of claim 13, wherein a candidate auction behavior is a behavior of an auction similar to the current auction.

17. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

evaluating actual auction behavior according to bids received in the auction; and

modifying the at least one rule for controlling when a bid may be placed automatically in the auction according to the actual auction behavior.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein evaluating the actual auction behavior comprises:

characterizing the actual auction behavior according to bids received in the auction;

comparing the selected auction behavior to the actual auction behavior.

19. The method of claim 17, wherein modifying the at least one rule comprises:

selecting at least one alternative rule corresponding to the actual auction behavior.

20 The method of claim 19, wherein selecting the at least one alternative rule comprises selecting the at least one alternative rule randomly from among a plurality of rules.

21. A system for managing an auction, comprising:

means for identifying an auction behavior; and

means for identifying at least one rule for controlling when a bid may be placed automatically for a bidder in the auction according to the selected auction behavior.

22. A system for managing an auction, comprising:

an auction behavior selector providing an indication of a selected auction behavior; and

a rule generator having an input for receiving an indication of the selected auction behavior and an output providing at least one rule for controlling when a bid may be placed automatically for a bidder in the auction to encourage the selected auction behavior.

23. The system of claim 22, wherein the auction behavior selector comprises:

a comparator having an input for receiving the information about the at least one prior auction and information about the auction, and an output for providing an indication of at least one of the prior auctions similar to the auction;

a selector having an input for receiving the indication of one or more of the prior auctions identified as similar to the auction and an output for providing an indication of the auction behavior associated with a selected one or more of the prior auctions.

24. A computer program product comprising:

a computer readable medium; and

computer program instructions stored on the computer readable medium, wherein the computer program instructions, when executed by a computer, direct the computer to perform a method for managing an auction, the method comprising:

selecting an auction behavior; and

specifying at least one rule for controlling when a bid may be placed automatically for a bidder in the auction according to the selected auction behavior.

25. A method for selecting an auction behavior for an auction, comprising:

receiving information about the auction; and

matching the information about the auction to an auction behavior.

26. The method of claim 25, wherein matching the information about the auction to the auction behavior comprises:

receiving information about one or more prior auctions, wherein each of the prior auctions has an associated auction behavior;

identifying at least one of the prior auctions similar to the auction using the information about the auction and the information about the one or more prior auctions; and

selecting one or more of the prior auctions identified as similar to the auction.

27. The method of claim 26, further comprising selecting the auction behavior associated with the selected one or more prior auctions as the auction behavior.

28. The method of claim 26, wherein identifying at least one of the prior auctions similar to the auction comprises:

comparing information about the auction to the information about the one or more prior auctions using a metric to obtain a measure; and

comparing the measure to a threshold defining an extent of similarity.

29. The method of claim 26, wherein the selected one or more prior auctions has a best outcome among the at least one of the prior auctions identified as similar to the auction.

30. The method of claim 29, wherein a best outcome is at least one of a highest price and a fastest sale.

31. The method of claim 25, further comprising:

evaluating actual auction behavior according to bids received in the auction.

32. The method of claim 31, wherein evaluating the auction behavior comprises:

characterizing the actual auction behavior according to bids received in the auction; and

comparing the selected auction behavior to the actual auction behavior.

33. The method of claim 32, further comprising determining whether to implement a new rule if the auction behavior is substantially different from the selected auction behavior.

34. A system for selecting an auction behavior for an auction, comprising:
means for accepting information about the auction; and
means for comparing the information about the auction to a behavior.

35. A system for selecting an auction behavior for an auction, comprising:
a behavior database in which associations between information about auctions and auction behaviors is stored; and
a behavior selector having an input for receiving information about the auction and an output for providing an indication of an auction behavior for the auction using the behavior database

36. A computer program product comprising:
a computer readable medium; and
computer program instructions stored on the computer readable medium, wherein the computer program instructions, when executed by a computer, direct the computer to perform a method for selecting an auction behavior for an auction, the method comprising:
receiving information about the auction; and
matching the information about the auction to an auction behavior.

37. A method for specifying at least one rule for automatic bidding in an auction, comprising:
receiving an indication of a selected auction behavior; and
matching the auction behavior to the at least one rule to encourage the auction behavior.

38. The method of claim 37, wherein matching the auction behavior to rules comprises:
associating at least one rule with at least one candidate auction behavior from which the auction behavior is selected; and
selecting the at least one rule associated with the selected auction behavior.

39. The method of claim 38, wherein a candidate auction behavior is a behavior of an auction similar to the current auction.

40. The method of claim 38, wherein associating at least one rule with each candidate auction behavior comprises:

determining at least one rule which corresponds to each candidate auction behavior; and

storing the selected rules in a database in manner accessible by an indication of the candidate auction behavior.

41. The method of claim 40, wherein determining at least one rule which corresponds to each candidate auction behavior comprises:

characterizing each candidate auction behavior; and

selecting rules corresponding to the candidate auction behavior.

42. The method of claim 37, wherein the selected auction behavior differs from actual auction behavior during the auction, the method further comprising:

determining whether the selected auction behavior should be modified; and

modifying the at least one rule for controlling when a bid may be placed automatically in the auction according to the actual auction behavior.

43. The method of claim 42, wherein modifying the at least one rule comprises:

selecting a rule corresponding to the actual auction behavior

44. The method of claim 43, wherein selecting a rule comprises selecting the rule randomly from among a plurality of rules corresponding to the actual auction behavior.

45. A system for specifying a rule for automatic bidding in an auction, comprising:

means for accepting an indication of a selected auction behavior; and

means for comparing the auction behavior to rules to encourage the auction behavior.

46. A system for specifying a rule for automatic bids in an auction, comprising:

a rule database in which associations between rules and auction behaviors are stored; and

a rule selector having an input for receiving an indication of a selected auction behavior and an output providing rules to encourage the auction behavior from the rule database.

47. A computer program product, comprising:

a computer readable medium; and

computer program instructions stored on the computer readable medium, wherein the computer program instructions, when executed by a computer, direct the computer to perform a method for specifying a rule for automatic bids in an auction, comprising:

receiving an indication of a selected auction behavior; and

matching the auction behavior to rules to encourage the auction behavior.

48. A method for automatically placing a bid for an item for a bidder in an auction, comprising:

determining whether a bid for the bidder may be accepted;

applying a rule associated with the bidder and having a condition specifying when to place a bid; and

if the condition of the rule is satisfied, and if a highest bid in the auction is not from the bidder, and if a bid for the bidder may be accepted, placing the bid according to a specified bidding behavior.

49. The method of claim 48, wherein the condition is defined by information about the auction.

50. The method of claim 49, where the information about the auction includes at least one of a number of bids subsequent to a previous bid by the bidder and a period of time elapsed since the previous bid by the bidder.

51. The method of claim 49, wherein the information about the auction includes at least one of information about bidders participating in the auction, information about

bidders registered for the auction, information about status of the auction, and information about the item.

52. A system for automatically placing a bid for an item for a bidder in an auction, comprising:

means for evaluating a rule associated with the bidder and having a condition specifying when to place a bid; and

means, operative if the condition of the rule is satisfied and if a highest bid in the auction is not from the bidder and if a bid may be accepted for the bidder, for submitting the bid according to a specified bidding behavior.

53. A system for automatically placing a bid for an item for a bidder in an auction, comprising:

a rule application engine having an output indicative of when to place a bid according to a rule associated with the bidder and having a condition specifying when to place a bid; and

a bid generator, having a first input for receiving a specified bidding behavior and having an output for providing, when a time to place the bid arrives, an indication of a bid according to the specified bidding behavior if a highest bid in the auction is not from the bidder and if a bid may be accepted for the bidder.

54. A computer program product, comprising:

a computer readable medium; and

computer program instructions stored on the computer readable medium, wherein the computer program instructions, when executed by a computer, directs the computer to perform a method for automatically placing a bid for an item for a bidder in an auction, the method comprising:

determining whether a bid for the bidder may be accepted;

applying a rule associated with the bidder and having a condition specifying when to place a bid; and

if the condition of the rule is satisfied, and if a highest bid in the auction is not from the bidder and if a bid for the bidder may be accepted, placing the bid according to a specified bidding behavior.

55. A method for determining a behavior of an auction, comprising:

receiving information indicating bidding information for an auction;

determining at least one of an average time period between bids and an average increment between bids; and

storing the determined information as an associated auction behavior.

56. A method for determining a beneficial auction behavior for an auction of an item, comprising:

receiving information indicating an outcome and bidding information for a plurality of concluded auctions of similar items;

determining a behavior of each of the concluded auctions from the bidding information:

selecting the behavior of the auction having the best outcome as the beneficial auction behavior.

57. A digital information product, comprising:

a computer-readable medium; and

information stored on the computer-readable medium and defining data associating each of one or more desired auction behaviors to one or more rules for controlling when a bid may be placed automatically for a bidder in an auction.

58. A digital information product defining a proxy bidder, comprising:

a computer-readable medium;

information stored on the computer-readable medium and defining data associating a maximum bid and a bidder with an indication of a rule for controlling when a bid may be placed automatically for a bidder in an auction.